

Abdul Taib Mahmud



Prime Minister's house
Plot to
1989

March 9, 1987, a group of 27
Assemblemen announced in
one of the Bersatu group that it
st confidence in Tan Sri Haji
However, the State Legislative
Assembly was dissolved the next
day, and a State election was held on
March 15 and 16, 1987.
"In that election, the Barisan won
28 of the 48 seats contested while the
Bersatu group, then known as the
Maju group, won 20 — 15 going to
Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak
(PBDS) and five to Persatuan Ra-
jat Malaysia Sarawak (Permas).
A suicide squad was set up to
plant bombs of arson, plant bombs
sabotage. This squad
of several Ibans, but
Malay/Melanau
Consequently,
place in Serian
April 6 and

Taib tells
new plans
to help

Taib's quest to
develop

There is a political crisis in Sarawak
one views on this? Will it have any
Nasional's chances in the ne
There is speculation that Sa
There is speculation that Sa
the same way as Sabah.
Those opposing the Bar
relationship among the Bar
here is very good. We can
The race relationship
Sabah.
what it was 10 years
openness discuss
not sure whether
phase which
The Bar
formula
old (r

which pla
Tan Sri H
Their pl
● inci
against T
cially a
through
letters;
● co
plantin
around
vers
Saraw
Malay
● Taib
ing
hou
toy
E
ple
fl
fl
ion
action and
een May 8
t helped to
newhat.
was still
ng Malay
leaders of
an Melay
n Sri Nep
tised he
d the int
nd who c
he Chin
Malays.
ate elec
task f





To YAB

Dato Sri Najib
Tun Razak;

Thank you for
writing the foreword
for the book!!

Jane
13/10/13





A Political History of Sarawak's

Pehin Sri

Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud
(July 22, 1963 – September 16, 2013)

PUSTAKA PERDANA



1012303

BY

JAMES RITCHIE



© James Ritchie, 2013
Editor: Patrick Yeoh

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of the author.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the author's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN: 978-983-41894-3-3

Printed by Wisma Printing Sdn Bhd

Lot 1949, Section 66, KTL D, Lorong Tekad 1, Jalan Tekad,
Pending Industrial Estate, 93450 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Tel: 082-338131 Fax: 082-333002 E-mail: wismaprinting@yahoo.com

ii
320.959 2
DIT

Acknowledgements

I would like to record my deepest gratitude and appreciation to the following people and organisations who have contributed in one way or another, big and small, towards the realisation of this book:

YAB Dato Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, Prime Minister of Malaysia, for so kindly writing the Foreword.

To Pehin Sri Dr Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud for allowing me the honour to put on record, the many details and insights of his long and illustrious career in public life and for the use of numerous exclusive photographs and records that have helped to enhance the contents of this book and Datuk Amar Laila Taib and her daughter Hanifah for their insightful comments and help.

Not forgetting Dato' Salleh Rafie, Director General, Information Department, Malaysia, for allowing me access to the comprehensive photographic archives of the Information Department, from which I have drawn liberally to illustrate this book, Datuk Mohd Tufail Mahmud and his son Yakub for their encouragement, support and invaluable help in sourcing and sorting information and photographs and Datuk Mohamad Asfia Awang Nassar and many others.

Last but not least my thanks to good friend Datuk Hasmi Hasnan as well as the hardworking Wisma Printing Staff.

James Ritchie

Other Titles by James Ritchie.

1. **Sarawak : Kemenangan Bermaruah**
Ritchie, James : Petaling Jaya : Pelanduk Publications, 1987
2. **Sarawak : A Gentleman's Victory for Taib Mahmud**
Ritchie, James : Petaling Jaya : Pelanduk, 1987
3. **Sarawak Awakens : Taib Mahmud's Politics of Development**
Jitab, Kris : Kuala Lumpur : Pelanduk, 1992
4. **Politik Pembangunan Taib Mahmud**
Petaling Jaya : Pelanduk Publications, 1992
5. **Bujang Senang Terror of Batang Lupar**
RITCHIE, James Alexander : Kuching : Samasa, 1993
6. **A Political Saga : Sarawak 1981-1993**
Ritchie, James : Singapore : Summer Times, 1993
7. **Bujang Senang : Raja Batang Lupar**
Ritchie, James : Kuching : Wisma Printing, 1994
8. **Bruno Manser : The Inside Story**
Ritchie, James, 1950- : Singapore : Summer Times, 1994
9. **State Elections in Sarawak**
10. **A Pictorial on Kuching City**
11. **SILVERSTONE Trans-Borneo : International jungle Periplus
: a historic, 5,000km expedition around the world's third largest
island**
- : Malaysia : Silverstone Tire & Rubber, 1997
12. **Perubahan dan Cabaran Sarawak 1963-1998**
Ritchie, James, 1950- : Sibu : Sanyan, 1999
13. **Changes & Challenges : Sarawak 1963-1998**
Ritchie, James, 1950- : Sibu : Sanyan, 1999
14. **The Life Story of Temenggong Koh, 1870-1956**
Ritchie, James : Kuching : Kaca Holdings, 1999
15. **BLESSED Destiny**
- : [Kuching] : 1999
16. **The Adventures of Johnny Ritchie**
Subang Jaya, Selangor : Pelanduk Publication, 1999
17. **Tun Ahmad Zaidi : Son of Sarawak**
Ritchie, James, 1950- : Subang Jaya : Pelanduk, 2000
18. **Tun Ahmad Zaidi : Anak Watan Sarawak**
Ritchie, James, 1950- : Kuching : 2001

19. **Honour Before Self**
Ritchie, James. : Kuching : Massa Kasturi Management, 2001
20. **Man-eating Crocodiles of Borneo**
Ritchie, James : Kota Kinabalu : Natural History Publications [Borneo], 2002
21. **Connections : A Sarawak Communications and Multimedia Story**
- : Kuala Lumpur : Suruhanjaya Komunikasi dan Multimedia Malaysia, 2003
22. **Who Gives A Dam! : The Bakun Odyssey**
Ritchie, James : Kuching : Wisma Printing, 2005
23. **Abdul Taib Mahmud : 41 Years In The News**
Ritchie, James, 1950- : Kuching : 2005
24. **Temenggong Oyong Lawai Jau : A Paramount Chief in Borneo : The Legacy**
Ritchie, James, 1950- : Kuching : 2006
25. **Crown Jewel of The North : Sarawak's Limbang division**
Ritchie, James, 1950- : Kuching : 2006
26. **Rentap : Warrior, Legend and Enigma**
Ritchie, James : Kuching, Sarawak : 2009
27. **Penan on The Move: A Reporter's Travelogue**
Ritchie, James : 2009
28. **Crimson Tide Over Borneo : Untold Police Stories and Cessation of The Sarawak Communist Insurgency (1952 - 1990)**
Ritchie, James. : Kuching : Persatuan Bekas Polis Malaysia, 2011

Contents

Foreword by YAB Dato' Sri Mohd Najib Bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak, Prime Minister of Malaysia	<i>xiii</i>
Introduction	<i>1</i>
Chapter One A Dream Fulfilled	<i>13</i>
• Independence at Last	<i>15</i>
• Malaysia Day	<i>17</i>
• Great Task at Hand	<i>18</i>
• A “Remarkably Roadless” Country	<i>18</i>
• Meeting the Challenges	<i>19</i>
• Public Works Department	<i>21</i>
• Security	<i>24</i>
• Security Threat	<i>24</i>
• Spirit of Nationalism	<i>28</i>
• United We Stand, Divided We Fall	<i>29</i>
• Better Air Services	<i>30</i>
• UMNO	<i>31</i>
• Mediating the Sabah Alliance Crisis	<i>31</i>
• United Nations	<i>32</i>
• Ningkan Land Bill Crisis	<i>32</i>
• Freezing of Timber Licences	<i>34</i>
• Chastised for a Second Time	<i>36</i>
• No Confidence Motion	<i>38</i>
• Council Negri Centenary Speech	<i>39</i>
• The Straw that Broke the Camel’s Back	<i>41</i>

Chapter Two	Apprenticeship in Kuala Lumpur (1968-1973)	55
•	Making Waves in Commerce and Industry	56
•	Pioneer Status	57
•	Small and Medium-sized Industries Urged to be Self-reliant	59
•	Seeking ADB Help	60
•	Uniting the Various Chambers of Commerce	60
•	A Full Federal Minister at 35	61
•	Reorganising the Rubber Industry	62
•	Rubber - Policy of Co-operation	63
•	First Tourism Master Plan	65
•	Second Malaysia Plan	68
•	Leader of the ASPAC Delegation	69
•	New Approaches Towards Timber Activities	70
•	Malaysian Timber Promotion Board	71
•	Pulp and Paper	73
•	Rescuing the Tobacco Industry	74
•	Environmental Consciousness	75
•	More Forest Reserves	76
•	Oil Palm - the Golden Hope	77
•	Oil and Gas Boom	78
•	HIKMA - Forerunner of Petronas	80
•	Championing Tin	81
•	A Hectic Schedule	82
•	Social Responsibilities: Culture and Religion	83
•	A Culture of Self-respect	84
•	A Straight-talking Sensitive “People’s Man”	85
Chapter Three	Tested and Trusted (1974-1980)	97
•	Food Production	98
•	Strong Saudi Ties	99
•	Sarawak Tour	99
•	KL’s First Flood Control Plan	100

• Role of the Media	101
• Winning the Hearts and Minds	102
• Major Reshuffle in Hussein Onn's Cabinet	104
• Turning KL into the World's Largest Rubber Market	104
• RISDA - the Hope of the Poor Rubber Smallholder	105
• International Common Fund	106
• Trouble-shooter	107
• A Pro-active Minister of Defence	108
• Manufacturing of Weapons	109
• Zone of Neutrality	110
• Defence Study Centre	110
• A Disciplined Army	111
• Advanced Defence Technology	112
• Malaysia's First Federal Territory Minister	113
• Attending to the City's Social Woes	113
• Better Infrastructure and Facilities	114
• First Kuala Lumpur Master Plan	115
• A Tested Politician	116
Chapter Four Rebuilding Sarawak	141
• A New Journey	144
• The IADP Concept	145
• Equitable Distribution of Wealth	145
• Oil Palm - Hope of the Future	147
• Developing Native Customary Land	148
• New Land Development Projects	151
• Education and Development	152
• Rural Growth Centres	153
• SEDC's Bumiputera Role	155
• The Philosophy Behind Politics of Development	156
• Vision for a New Frontier	158
• Dewan Suarah - A Confluence for the People	159
• Sarawak Economic Master Plan	160

• Manpower and Training Programmes	160
• Better Infrastructure and Communications	162
• Economic Well-being	163
• More Tourist Attractions	165
• The Making of a City	167
• City of Two Mayors	168
• A Second Tourism Master Plan	169
Chapter Five Greater Empowerment	189
• Reviving the Golden Era	191
• Oil - The First Source of Power	191
• From Fishing Village to Boom Town	192
• Thrust in Hydropower	194
• Revenue from Timber	196
• Penan Blockades	197
• ITTO's Role in Forest Policy	199
• A Modern Civil Service	201
• Humanising Bureacracy	202
• A Knowledgeable Society	203
• The Way Forward	204
• Great Task at Hand	205
• The Essence to Achieving Success	206
Chapter Six Braving the Future	229
• Humility, the Key to Earning Respect	230
• Social Justice	231
• The Scourge of Modernization	231
• Steward of the House	232
• Defending Development Projects	233
• Facing New Challenges	234
• Smart Partnerships	235
• Keeping Abreast of Frontier Technologies	236

• Greater Expectations and Demands	237
• Stimulating Economic Growth in 2004	238
• Enhancing BIMP-EAGA Co-operation	238
• Cross-Border Issues	239
• Reviving Border Scout Patrols	240
• Foreign Labour Issues	240
• A Fitting Tribute to Dr Mahathir and Pak Lah	241

Chapter Seven Political Turbulence 253

• Aborted resignation	255
• Hussein Onn Retires	257
• SNAP crisis	259
• PBDS and the Barisan Plus formula	260
• State Elections of 1983	261
• Bintulu Deep Water Port Incident	262
• Dr Mahathir hits out at Taib's detractors	263
• Battle Royale	264
• Dayakism loses steam	268
• PBDS rejoins the State BN	268
• Taib's first walkover	269
• Another election victory	271

Chapter Eight A Time For Healing 287

• Peace and Calm at Demak Jaya	288
• The Chinese Factor	289
• Taib Delivers	290
• Historic Moment	291
• Political Reconciliation	291
• Sarawak's Record Number of Cabinet Ministers	292
• A time for healing	293

Chapter Nine	An Overview – Man of the Moment	305
•	Life Story of Abdul Taib Mahmud	305
•	Sarawak’s youngest acting Chief Minister	307
•	A pioneer of PBB	308
•	Apprenticeship under Tun Razak	309
•	Petronas - brainchild of Taib	310
•	Federal Minister of Defence	311
•	Fourth Chief Minister of Sarawak	312
•	Awards and Honours	314
•	Politics of Development	315
•	Political stalwart	316
•	An Environmental Master Plan for Sarawak	316
•	Developing Native Customary Land	317
•	Sarawak - Malaysia’s richest State by 2030	318
Epilogue		320
Chronology		322
Milestones		331
Bibliography and References		341





FOREWORD

Abdul Taib Mahmud — 50 years in the News is about the political achievements of the Chief Minister of Sarawak — Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud. A lawyer by training, Taib was a founder member of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, rising from the ranks to become one of Nation's leading politicians.

On July 22, 1963 Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud was one of first six pioneer Sarawakians to be sworn in as State cabinet ministers. Abdul Taib Mahmud served in several portfolios in the State for four years before winning the Samarahan Parliamentary constituency in 1967. A year later at the age of 32 Taib was appointed as Assistant Minister of Commerce and Industry in the Federal cabinet under "Bapa Malaysia" Tunku Abdul Rahman.

In the initial four years he was in the Federal Cabinet, Taib became Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister's department, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Deputy Minister of Works, Posts and Telecommunications before being appointed as a full Minister in charge of Natural Resources on January 1, 1972.

Under Malaysia's second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, Taib was given the opportunity to wear many hats — also as Acting Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Minister of Primary Industries, Minister of General Planning and Socio-Economic Research and Minister of Information and Special Functions and acting Minister of Labour and Manpower. Within a period of seven years, Taib had served in 10 Ministries.

Between 1976 and 1980 and under the guidance of Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn, Taib was given three more portfolios — as Minister of Primary Industries, Minister of Defence and Minister of Federal Territory — before it was time for him to move to greener pastures.

On March 26, 1981, Abdul Taib Mahmud was appointed as Sarawak's fourth Chief Minister and over the last 32 years has been at the helm of the government. Sarawak has since then flourished under his leadership making the State a role model for Malaysians. In the recent May 5, 2013 General Election Sarawak *Barisan Nasional* under Taib performed exceptionally well.

I would like to congratulate Pehin Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud for bringing Sarawak closer to the 2020 Vision and to his leadership for over half a decade — which has seen Sarawak achieve greater success and development.

DATU' SRI MOHD NAJIB



INTRODUCTION

On August 31, 1957, Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman proudly announced to the world that Malaya had become an independent nation.

Far across the seas in Australia, 21-year-old Abdul Taib Mahmud, a first year law student, received the news with mixed feelings.

“Would Sarawak be bold enough and follow in Malaya’s footsteps?” he asked himself. However, for the moment, he had to be focused on the most important task at hand - to pass his law examinations.

Little did Taib realise that Tunku had already made plans to accommodate the neighbouring British colonies of Singapore, Sarawak and Sabah and the British protectorate of Brunei. If the four entities could unite with Malaya into a federation, it would be a dream comes true.

As the young aspiring lawyer continued with his studies and set about to complete what he had gone to a foreign country to do - to qualify as a lawyer - there was to be much water under the bridge, as the architect of Malaysia and Malaya’s first Prime Minister went about laying the foundation of Malaysia.

During the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ meeting in London in February 1961, Tunku Abdul Rahman brought up the subject of a Federation of Malaysian states. Even though British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan was non-committal, he told Tunku that if this were to happen, the Borneo states must be willing partners and “advised Tunku against giving the impression that Malaya wished to force the Borneo states to join them.” (*Tunku, 1987*)

At that stage, a handful of political parties had been born in Sarawak and their leaders - even though opposed to the idea of Malaysia because



they did not want to be under the control of Malaya - believed that the Borneo states should first unite and form their own federation. Yet Tunku did not give up hope and pushed for unity of the Malayan and Bornean states.

EARLY POLITICAL STRUGGLE

On May 16, 1946, the Council Negri voted in favour of the cession of Sarawak to Great Britain. The seed of political awareness had been sown. A year later, the Sarawak Youth Front or Barisan Pemuda Sarawak (BPS) - a predominantly native movement - was formed to champion the cause of the “Bumiputeras” of the land. However, an anti-cession group called “Rukun Tigabelas” (Thirteen Principles), in their struggle for independence, resorted to violence, leading to the assassination of Sarawak Governor Duncan Stewart on December 4, 1949. Following this, the predominantly Malay-Melanau-based BPS adopted a gentler approach in seeking the help of their Muslim counterparts from Malaya to champion their cause.

Despite this, it was the Kuching-based Sarawak United People’s Party (SUPP) that took the lead when, on June 16, 1959, it was registered as the first political party in the state. This triggered off a rush to register parties along regional lines. Within two years, five parties were formed, starting with Parti Negara Sarawak (PANAS), which was registered on April 9, 1960 and led by Datuk Bandar Abang Mustapha, to represent the Kuching Malays.

A year later, a group of Sarawak-based Ibans formed the Sarawak National Party (SNAP) on April 10, 1961. Eight months later, on December 29, 1961, the Rajang Basin’s Barisan Rakyat Jati Sarawak (BARJASA), headed by local leader Datuk Tuanku Bujang Tuanku Osman, came into existence.

One of the last pre-Malaysia parties to be formed was the Sarawak Chinese Association (SCA), led by Sibu-based Chinese Foochow tycoon Datuk Ling Beng Siew. Not to be left out, a group of Iban “aristocrats” led by the paramount chief, Temenggong Jugah anak Barieng from Kapit,



formed the Parti Pesaka (PESAKA) on August 15, 1962.

Even though the SUPP was multi-racial, the majority of its members were Chinese. Though it had a strong Iban and Bidayuh following, it soon became obvious that SUPP was moving along different lines. Many of its members were sympathisers of the Clandestine Communist Organisation (CCO), which had never been on good terms with the majority of the Ibans. In fact, between 1948 and the late 1950s, the Ibans had been recruited as trackers during the period of the anti-communist Emergency in Malaya. Given the historical socio-economic imbalance between the two races and, prompted by some leaders with vested interests, it became apparent that the two groups were on a collision course.

SUPP, in particular, felt cornered and thought they had become pawns in the power struggle and a victim of the colonial “divide and rule” policy. Right from the start, they were suspicious of the British administration that seemed determined to “coerce” Sarawak into forming a federation with the states in Malaya.

SUPP had also been infiltrated by staunch communists Wen Ming Chyuan and Bong Kee Chok, to name a few, who began to organise cells in SUPP, the Chinese schools and trade unions. They worked closely with the neighbouring Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI). This situation eventually led to a protracted war in Sarawak, from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, between the security forces and the communists, resulting in hundreds of casualties and millions of dollars in destruction. An SUPP Chairman, the late Stephen Yong Kuet Tze said in his memoirs, “A Life Twice Lived”:

“The violent approach was not in keeping with the SUPP’s dedication to achieve changes through a constitutional struggle and the practice of parliamentary democracy. In my opinion, the issues that led to the Insurgency were political and social in nature and therefore the military actions unleashed on Sarawak were both inappropriate and unnecessary.”



ANNOUNCEMENT IN SINGAPORE

On May 27, 1961, Tunku made an important announcement at the Foreign Correspondents Association luncheon in Singapore. He said:

“Malaya today, realizes that she cannot stand alone, in isolation. Sooner or later, she should have an understanding with Britain and the people of the territories of Singapore, North Borneo, Sarawak and Brunei. It is premature for me to say how this closer understanding can be brought about but it is inevitable that we should look ahead to this objective and think of a plan whereby these territories can be brought together in political and economic co-operation.”

It was a turning point in Sarawak’s history.

Tunku had chosen the right place to make the announcement. It was also well timed as the communists were making headway in South East Asia and had already taken root in Borneo, mainly in Kalimantan and Sarawak.

Long before the “Malaysia concept” took root, Tunku had already made overtures about his intentions in Brunei and Sarawak. Several flying visits to the region gave much optimism to the Prime Minister who had begun to enjoy the taste of freedom since Malaya’s independence on August 31, 1957. Tunku had heard that Sarawak had a high rate of illiteracy and if this was not checked it was a matter of time before the state fell into communist hands. If the remarks of Lord Selkirk (the British Commissioner-General of South East Asia) were anything to go by, then Sarawak’s natives were doomed to remain as “headhunters”. This kind of statement not only riled many Sarawak leaders who were already anti-colonial, but also aroused the feeling of nationalism in Malaysians such as the young Ghazali Shafie.

While accompanying the Malayan Yang DiPertuan Agong on a state visit to Brunei in July 1961, Tunku and his trusted UMNO colleague and friend, Ghazali Shafie, the Permanent Secretary of

the Ministry of External Affairs, were politely told that the Sultanate was not ready to enter into a federation as yet. By then he had already set his “Greater Malaysia Plan” in motion.

Undeterred by the Sultan, Tunku stopped over in Sibu, which was considered the hub of Sarawak’s political struggle and spent two days meeting and conferring with local political leaders as well as members from the influential Barisan Pemuda Sarawak (BPS), led by Sarawak’s first Bumiputera graduate and educationist, Ahmad Zaidi Adruce bin Muhammed Noor.

GREATER MALAYSIA PLAN

After the Sibu visit, Tunku stopped over in Kuching and told the press that he had already sent a memorandum of his “Greater Malaysia Plan” to London and revealed that the proposed name of the federation would be revealed later.

The compassionate Tunku said that the Borneo territories were in dire need of financial assistance and that if they entered into the federation they would enjoy “absolute equality”. He argued that there was no need for a federation of Borneo territories as advocated by Donald Stephens of North Borneo (Sabah).

The Prime Minister also expressed his fears that the communists, who were gaining ground in the region, were opposed to the federation for obvious reasons. His estimate was that at least \$5.2 billion had to be spent on a five-year development plan for Borneo’s British Commonwealth states.

“When I say federation with the Borneo Territories, I mean that they should be the same as the other states of Malaya. We have 11 states that form the Federation of Malaya and if the Borneo Territories (Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo) decide to come in, there will be 14 - all enjoying absolute equality, one with the other,” Tunku said.

CALL FOR SUPPORT

On October 15, 1961, Tunku told the House of Representatives in Kuala Lumpur it was not true that Malaya wanted to colonise the Borneo Territories. He said:

“To say that the people there (Borneo) are not ready is wrong. After all, Penang and Malacca were British colonies a little while ago. When they joined the independent Federation of Malaya they became independent. If this can happen here, why not Borneo?”

Supporting the move to form Malaysia, Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew said in a broadcast in Kuching that if the Borneo Territories joined the federation their legitimate interests would be protected.

“We in Singapore and Malaya have had the advantage of better and higher educational facilities. We have more local graduates and professional men. We have become more sophisticated and competitive.

“If there were no safeguards, you may perhaps find competition with the city people of Singapore and the Federation of Malaya harder and more exacting.

“But that is what we are here to talk about, to find out how your legitimate interests can be protected, how you can have control over your own local destiny in the Borneo Territories after merger in the Federation of Malaysia,” he said.

THE COBBOLD COMMISSION

During the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) conference in July 1961, it was decided that a Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee (MSCC) be formed following the suggestion by Donald Stephens of North Borneo and Yeo Cheng Hoe of Sarawak. Four meetings were held before a commission was established in early 1962 to give the official sanction for Sarawak and North Borneo to become part of the federation.

A five-man Commission of Enquiry led by Lord Cobbold, a former



Governor of the Bank of England, arrived in Kuching to ascertain the views of the people of Sarawak and North Borneo on February 19, 1962. Apart from Lord Cobbold, the other members were Ghazali Shafie (later Tan Sri), a former chief minister of Penang, Wong Pow Nee, a former chief secretary of the Federation of Malaya, Sir David Watherston and a former Governor of Sarawak, Sir Anthony Abell.

After the completion of the Cobbold Commission report in April 1962, the way to independence was paved - the Report was signed and sealed on June 21, 1962. A month later, Tunku and MacMillan announced the formation of an Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) comprising representatives from Britain, Malaya, Sarawak and North Borneo. Among other things, the IGC's role was to study a variety of subjects - ranging from the State constitutions, delegation of Federal powers to the state, the judiciary, religion, citizenship, immigration, education, the position of the natives, languages and representation in the Federal parliament.

Lord Landsdowne was nominated as chairman while Malaya's deputy premier Dato Abdul Razak Hussein was appointed his deputy. Sarawak's IGC delegation headed by the Sarawak Chief Secretary, F.D. Jakeway comprised six local members - Datuk Bandar Abang Haji Mustapha, Temenggong Jugah, Pengarah Montegrai, Chia Chin Shin, Ling Beng Siew and Ong Kee Hui.

ANTI-MALAYSIA CAMPAIGN

While most of the Bumiputera parties - BARJASA, PANAS and SNAP - generally supported the federation concept, individual branches of the SUPP launched a state-wide anti-Malaysia signature campaign. When the Cobbold Commission arrived in Kuching on March 9, 1962, "loud and strong protests" against the Malaysia plan were voiced by the leaders of the SUPP rally at their headquarters.

"An estimated crowd of 7,000 Chinese with a few Malays, Ibans and Bidayuh were present. Banners and placards all bearing expressions of protest against the Malaysia Plan were displayed within the



compound of the headquarters.” (*A compilation of speeches on the Formation of Malaysia, 1991, 73*). Some members said that anyone who agreed to the plan was a traitor because Malaya intended to “swallow up Sarawak.”

The people of Sarawak were divided. For example, the Miri district council opposed the Malaysia plan while Sibu councillors were for it. In Mukah, the Chinese opposed the formation of Malaysia while the Melanaus, the fifth largest community in the State (45,000 then), were in favour.

Representatives from Kampung Nangka, Banyok and Telok Bango in Sibu were among the first to support the plan together with Melanaus from Mukah and Binatang (now Bintangor). One of their Sibu leaders, a headman, “Tua Kampung” Abang Louise Barieng - later to be appointed Governor of Sarawak - was elected to present an 11-point memorandum to the Cobbold Commission.

The memorandum read:

“We are mostly a backward type of people engaged in fishing and farming and most of our people depend on the sago industry. Nearly one third are Christians and the rest Pagans.

“As our people are not educated there is no point in listening to our rank and file. The only people who can speak for the Melanaus as a community are the tua kampungs.”

The memorandum added among other things that because most Melanau children were illiterate, they asked for special concessions for their children to enter the government service.

One of the strongest rural supporters of the Malaysia concept was the people of Betong. Led by Betong District Council chairman Pengarah Montegrai together with a deputation of the Malay Tua Kampung Abang Karim bin Abang Hassan and Kapitan China Yong Shaw Neng, they submitted their resolution to the Commission. Other Iban leaders in the Simanggang (Sri Aman) area such as Penghulu Storey anak Ngumbang, Penghulu Rengga of Undup, Edwin Tangkun of Batang Lupar supported the concept but feared for the community which was small.

Later, Betong-based Sarawak National Party chairman (SNAP)



J.S. Tinker also issued a statement hailing the Cobbold Commission as an “unbiased masterpiece of views”.

In the Ulu Lingga area, the Ibans who supported the scheme wanted the supreme head of Sarawak to be called “Rajah”. Among the Limbang supporters were councillors Habibullah bin Majid, Gawan anak Jangga, Ahim bin Burut and James Wong Kim Min, who would become Sarawak’s first deputy chief minister.

TUN RAZAK’S ASSURANCE

In August 1962, Malaya’s deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein gave his assurance that the Federation of Malaysia would bring good fortune to Sarawak. In a broadcast made in Kuching Razak said that with the formation of Malaysia, Sarawakians would be guaranteed democracy and equal rights and have complete freedom of worship. He said that there would be greater development in both the urban and rural areas.

In November 1962, Tunku visited Sarawak. After visiting Jesselton (Kota Kinabalu), he flew into Miri to an anti-Malaysia demonstration while inspecting a police guard of honour. Despite shouts of anti-Malaysia slogans, Tunku waved at the demonstrators and even walked to the crowd to shake hands with the residents who had gathered for the campaign.

TUNKU’S TOUR OF SARAWAK

His next stop was Kuching airport where Tunku was received by Governor Sir Alexander Waddell and members of the Sarawak supreme council - Tuan Mufti, Haji Yusuf bin Abdul Rahman Shebli, Canon (later Bishop) Howes, the acting Provost of the Anglican Diocese, the Catholic Vicar Delegate Reverend Father Harry van Erp and representatives from five political parties which formed the Sarawak United Front. Tunku also inspected a 50-man Guard of Honour mounted by the jungle-green clad Field Force and inspected



the ceremonially dressed Sarawak Constabulary band.

Also greeting him were Malay womenfolk dressed in white *selendang* and waving paper flags shouting “Merdeka” and “Hidup Malaysia” and Tunku met them personally. As Tunku emerged from the airport, a group of about 3,000 anti-Malaysia Chinese jeered at the entourage as riot police stood guard.

Together with Waddell, they headed for Pengkalan Batu where another pro-Malaysia crowd awaited Tunku. Entering the Governor’s barge they headed across the Sarawak River for the Astana - Tunku’s temporary residence during his stay in Kuching.

Before leaving, Tunku told a press conference that the majority of the natives of Sarawak supported Malaysia. He said he was satisfied that he had “cleared the doubts and fears” of those who doubted his sincerity in wanting to alleviate the standard of living of the people of Sarawak.

He told Radio Sarawak:

“I have no doubt that the sons of the soil (*Bumiputeras*) welcome the prospect of Malaysia. The Malaysia which we have in mind is one which will make this country free from the rule of the British and become independent and a partner with the 11 states of Malaya and Singapore.

“The new Malaysia will become a new nation - sovereign and independent - and we will have one Constitution to replace the old Constitution.

“The new Constitution will guarantee the rights - human rights - for the people of this nation wherever they may be, whether in Malaya or Borneo. This new Constitution will guarantee the freedom of worship, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of movement and the freedom of assembly.

“This Constitution will provide for the special rights of the states in Borneo - rights in respect of land, immigration and rights to administer the country and other rights which you now enjoy. This Constitution, too, guarantees parliamentary democracy, which means in parliament the peoples of these territories will be represented.”



ADOPTION OF THE IGC REPORT

The 14-point IGC report was completed and adopted on March 8, 1963 by the Sarawak Council Negeri. The Secretary-General of the Sarawak Alliance, Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan fully endorsed the report saying that the Sarawak government was happy with the “generous terms of safeguards” for the state.

Ong Kee Hui, whose SUPP strongly opposed the Malaysia Plan, spoke in support of the motion and said the council meeting was a historic one because it would decide the future of the people of Sarawak.

He said:

“My approach to Malaysia has always been a constructive one. For that reason, together with some members of this House, I attended the meetings of the Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee.

“In doing so, if I may say so, like my Honourable friends, we have been criticised. We have even been said to have signed away Sarawak for large sums of money. The fact that today this House has before it this motion, which is moved by the Attorney General, is, I think, indicative that we have done no such thing.”

Author James Ritchie in *Abdul Taib Mahmud: 50 Years in the News* meticulously chronicles, through countless newspaper and magazine reports, interviews, speeches and messages, the development and progress of a young Australian-trained Melanau lawyer from an idealistic young man to politician and eventually, Chief Minister of the state of Sarawak.

The book offers insights into the many facets, both public and private, of one of Malaysia's longest serving politicians - he has served under five Malaysian Prime Ministers, beginning with the country's Father of Independence, Tunku Abdul Rahman al-Haj - and brings to the fore, the man's many achievements, the challenges he faced, the dark moments and frustrations as well as his vision for the land of his birth and for the nation.

Abdul Taib Mahmud: 50 Years in the News faithfully traces the long and arduous journey taken by a man of vision, ideals and commitment to transform his home state of Sarawak from an economic backwater into one of the most developed states in the country with his "Politics of Development".



The Author

Born on June 26, 1950, James Ritchie has been a journalist for 40 years. After working as a reporter for the *NST* for 25 years, he left to join the Chief Minister's Department as a Consultant Public Relations Officer. He has also served as a Media Consultant with the *Borneo Post* and *See Hua Group*. He was Editorial Adviser of the *Eastern Times* in 2006 and is now Executive Director of The Sarawak Tribune. Ritchie is the author of 28 books on various Sarawak subjects and issues.

